



CHILD PROTECTION
OMBUDSMAN
of COLORADO

Joint Judiciary Committee SMART Government Act Hearing

CHILD PROTECTION OMBUDSMAN
STEPHANIE VILLAFUERTE

1/24/2022



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OMBUDSMAN
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HANDOUTS



Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2021



SMART Act Annual Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2021



SMART Act Annual Performance Report for Fiscal Year 2021



2022 Legislative Proposal

An Overview of the CPO & Highlights from FY 2021

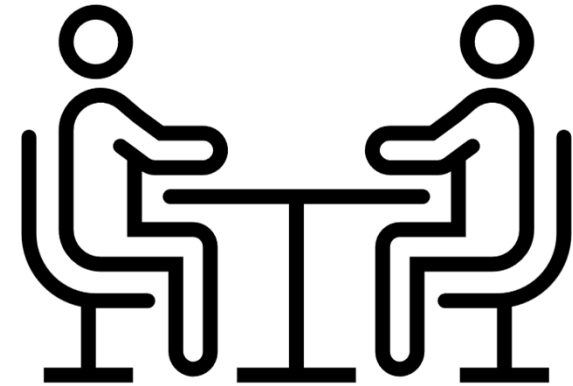


AN OMBUDSMAN'S ROLE

National Standards

- Independence
- Impartiality/Fairness
- Confidentiality
- Credibility/Integrity of the review process

Source: Model Ombudsman Act for State Governments by the United States Ombudsman Association





HOW WE GOT HERE

Achieving National Standards

- **Senate Bill 10-171**– Created a child protection ombudsman program in the Colorado Department of Human Services
- **Senate Bill 15-204** – Created an *independent* child protection ombudsman office
- **House Bill 21-1272**
 - Exempts CPO staff and documents from court proceedings to which the office is not a legal party
 - Expands CPO's access to documents related to an incident of egregious abuse or neglect, near fatality, or fatality of a child





A NEW, EXPANDED ROLE

Creating New Standards

- **House Bill 21-1313** – Allows the CPO to initiate investigations on behalf of unaccompanied immigrant children who are housed in state-licensed residential child care facilities and that are in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement
- **House Bill 21-1272** – The CPO is one of two ombudsman offices that will be utilizing Safety Science



Administration for Children & Families
Office of Refugee Resettlement





HOW WE WORK FOR COLORADO

We...

- Listen
- Research
- Resolve
- Identify Trends
- Create Lasting Change



Listen

We listen to people about their experience with and concerns about child protection.



Investigate

We research and investigate concerns reported by any Coloradan about service delivery within the child protection system.



Resolve

We determine the best way to resolve concerns – that might mean bridging communication barriers or resolving conflicts based on misunderstanding.



Identify Trends

We identify trends where the community's needs have changed and the system hasn't had the funding, resources or practices to keep up with it. As a result, we make public recommendations for system improvement.



Lasting Change

We convene lawmakers, professionals and other stakeholders to advance legislation and policies that have a lasting, positive impact on children and families.





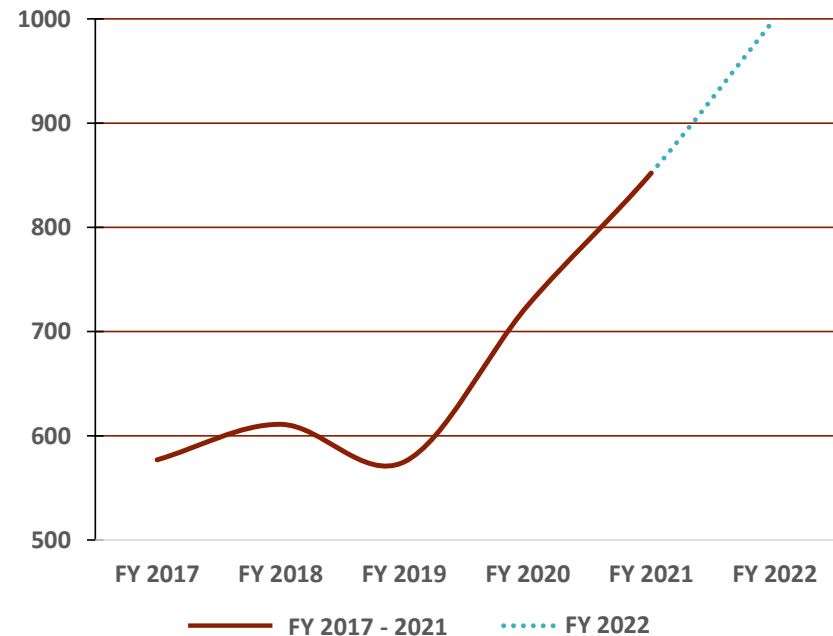
LISTEN, RESEARCH & RESOLVE

Client Services

We help clients:

- Navigate Colorado's complex child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- Ensure their case is being handled in accordance with state law and regulation
- Connect to resources to help their families

Number of Cases Per Fiscal Year
Since FY 2017

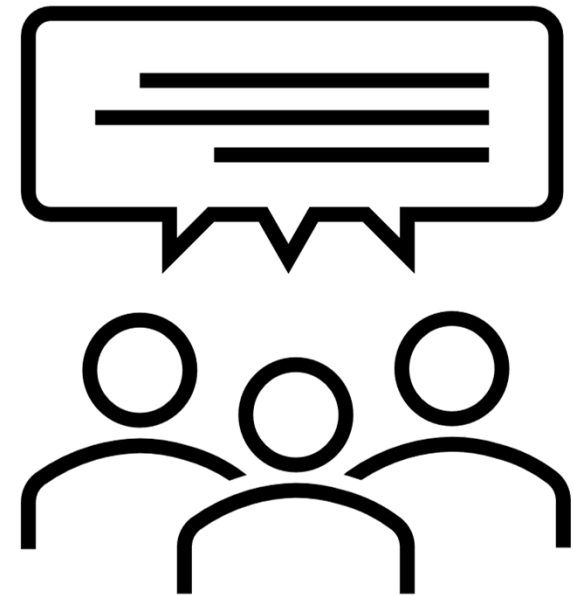




WHO CONTACTS US?

Our Clients Include...

- Children and youth in out-of-home placements and youth centers
- Parents
- Family members
- Concerned citizens
- Mandatory reporters
- State employees
- Employees of public entities that serve children
- Legislators and/or their constituents
- Unaccompanied immigrant children



OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS

Increased Presence

In FY 2021, the CPO continued its outreach efforts.

- Distributed posters to all 12 DYS youth centers and worked with DYS leadership to have the CPO listed in their handbooks for youth
- Held virtual meetings with youth from the Rocky Mountain Children's Law Center's project Foster Power and CDPHE's Youth Partnership for Health
- Connected with members of the General Assembly to share our work

Can the CPO help me?

The Office of Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman works on **behalf of children, youth and families** in Colorado.

CONTACT US
720-625-8640

The CPO is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If you call after hours, please leave a message and one of our analysts will work to contact you. Interpreters and translation services are available to anyone who contacts the CPO.

FILE A COMPLAINT
coloradocpo.org/complaint-form

We work independently of all other state agencies, including the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Division of Youth Services (DYS), the court system and law enforcement. We review any concerns about the services, living conditions and experiences of youth living in DYS facilities, residential facilities and/or foster homes. **Our goal is to improve the services provided to and the experiences of youth and families impacted by the child protection system.**

What are questions the CPO can help me answer?

The CPO has helped youth in Colorado answer the following questions:

- › How do I get visits with my family?
- › Who is making decisions about me and where I live?
- › How can I advocate for myself?
- › How do I find my siblings?
- › Why can't I live at home?
- › How do I get documents about my case?
- › What can I do if someone is hurting me?

What can the CPO do to help me?

- › We provide free and confidential services.
- › We review your concerns and questions about services, treatment and living conditions in DYS facilities, residential facilities or foster homes.
- › We explain how decisions are made in your case.
- › We give you information to help you advocate for yourself.

Interpreters and translation services are available to anyone who contacts the CPO.

Interpretes y servicios de traducción están disponibles para cualquier persona que contacte el CPO.

ENSURING SAFETY FOR COLORADO'S CHILDREN TODAY AND ENVISIONING A STRONGER CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM FOR THE FUTURE.





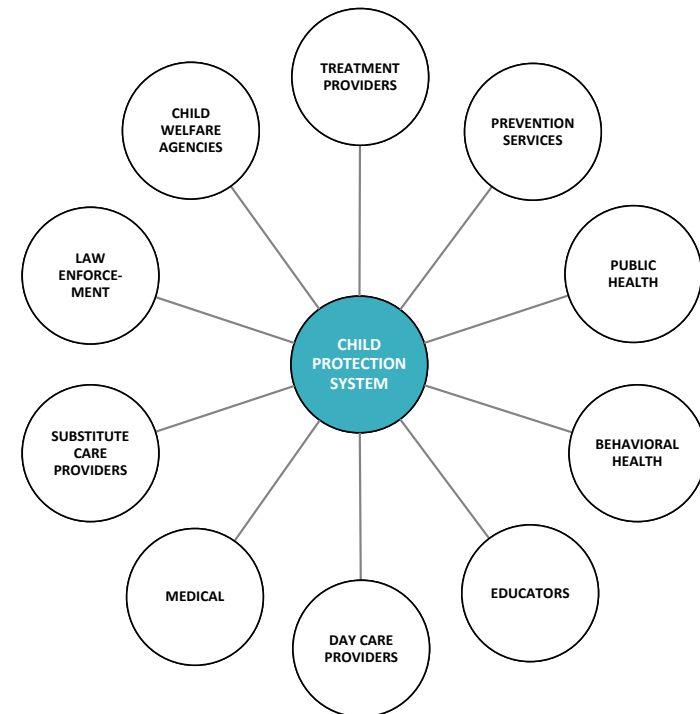
IDENTIFY TRENDS & CREATE LASTING CHANGE

Connecting the Dots

We help the child protection system by issuing recommendations for improvements.

We do the following to produce recommendations:

- Review calls to identify trends
- Attend and host stakeholder meetings
- Engage community partners
- Research jurisdictional laws, policies and practices

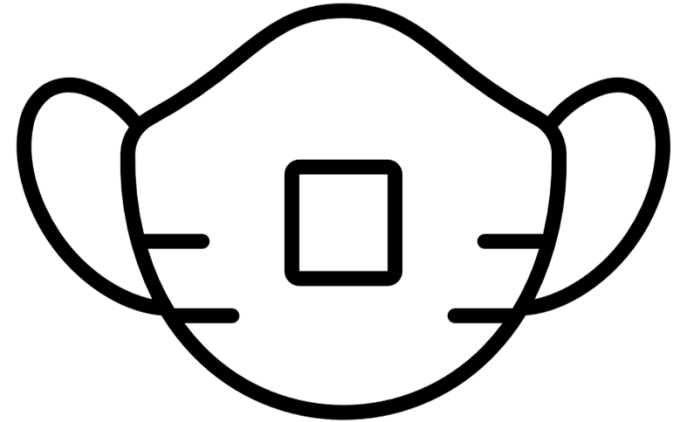




IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC

What We Are Hearing...

- The risk of COVID-19 exposure is being weighed
- Connecting remotely is a silver lining for some
- Delays are impacting families
- Testing and monitoring has been working





SPECIAL INITIATIVES

Working For Change

We address issues within the child protection system. Examples include:

- Quality of care in residential facilities
- Strengthening Colorado's mandatory reporting law to support those charged with reporting suspected child abuse and neglect
- Strengthening Colorado's foster youth protection laws
- Improving transparency and accessibility for reviews of child maltreatment deaths





LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: RESIDENTIAL CARE

“Abuse, neglect reports at children’s center trigger investigation across Colorado”

- The Denver Post

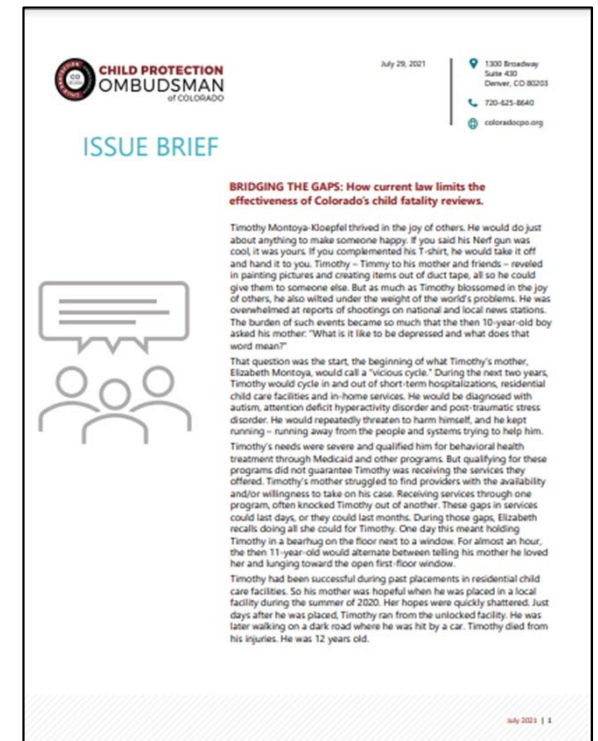
“Families kept in the dark about children’s safety in Colorado’s child welfare system”

- The Colorado Sun

“Two children die running away from residential treatment centers in Colorado”

- 9News Denver

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LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: MANDATORY REPORTING

“Colorado’s Child Protection Ombudsman Works To Clear Confusion About Mandatory Reporting”

- Colorado Public Radio

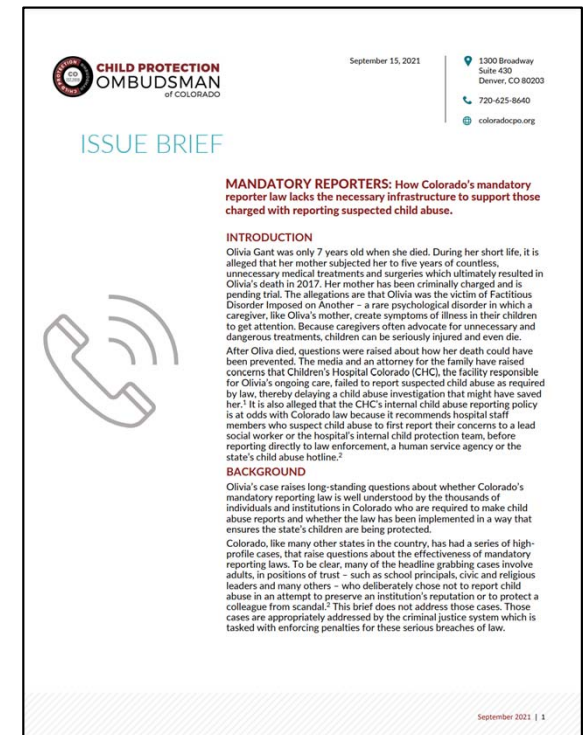
“New report finds serious gaps in Colorado's mandatory reporting laws for child abuse, neglect”

- Denver7 News

“Colorado’s child abuse reporting laws should be strengthened, watchdog says in wake of Olivia Gant death”

- The Denver Post

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LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: ELEVATING VOICES

Providing Insight

The CPO is working to establish mechanisms to capture what citizens are sharing with us, including:

- Experiences and concerns of youth in the child protection system
- Concerns and frustrations of parents and families receiving services
- Needs expressed by service providers and child welfare agencies
- Successes experienced by children and families



OUR WORK

Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman (CPO) was created to ensure Colorado's complex child protection system consistently provides high quality services to children and families in all 64 Colorado counties. We are independent from the state and county agencies that work on behalf of children and families. We listen to the public about their experience with and concerns about child protection, research and investigate those concerns, and determine the best way to resolve each concern. Our work also allows us to collaborate with lawmakers, professionals and other stakeholders to advance legislation and policies that will have a lasting, positive impact on our children and families.


Since our inception in 2010, the CPO has received more than 3,900 calls - up to seven calls per day - from Colorado citizens seeking answers and help. Most Coloradans who call us dial dozens of numbers before calling the CPO, which can be frustrating and confusing.

OUR IMPACT

3,935 CALLS FROM CONCERNED COLORADANS SINCE OUR INCEPTION	7 AVERAGE NUMBER OF CALLS CPO RECEIVES EACH DAY	64 SERVED CITIZENS IN ALL 64 COLORADO COUNTIES
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HOW WE WORK FOR COLORADO

Colorado's Child Protection Ombudsman was created to ensure the state's complex child protection system consistently provides high quality services to every child, family and community in Colorado.




LISTEN

We listen to people about their experience with and concerns about child protection.




INVESTIGATE

We research and investigate concerns reported by any Coloradan about service delivery within the child protection system.




RESOLVE

We determine the best way to resolve concerns - that might mean bridging communication barriers or resolving conflicts based on misunderstanding.



IDENTIFY TRENDS

We identify trends where the community's needs have changed and the system hasn't had the funding, resources or practices to keep up. As a result, we make public recommendations for system improvement.



CREATE CHANGE

We convene lawmakers, professionals and other stakeholders to advance legislation and policies that have a lasting, positive impact on children and families.

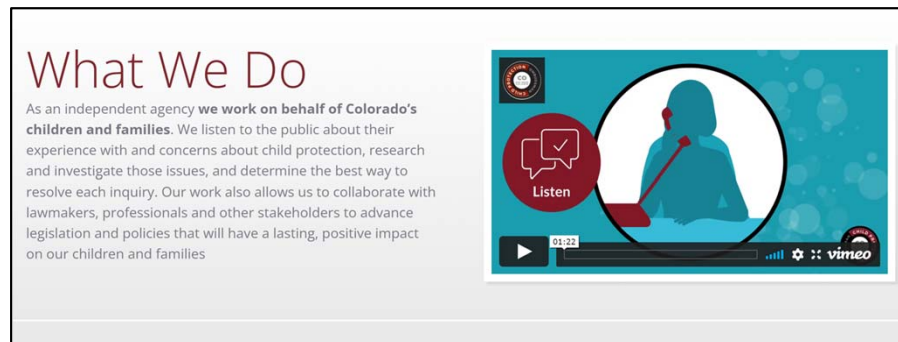


RESOURCES FOR LEGISLATORS

Information for Change

The CPO:

- Provides issue briefs to help the state create change
- Shares unbiased, independent research on topics related to child protection
- Helps address your constituents' concerns regarding issues with child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health and prevention services



Questions?



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CONTACT US



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720-625-8640



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[linkedin.com/company/cocpo](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cocpo)